THE DOCTRINE OF

DIVINE INFLUENCE

ON THE HUMAN MIND,

CONSIDERED, IN A

SERMON,

Published at the Request of many Persons who have occasionally heard it,

BY

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL. D. F. R. S.

——— The first Almighty Cause
Acts not by partial, but by general Laws.

POPE.

BATH, PRINTED BY R. CRUTTWELL;
AND SOLD BY
J. JOHNSON, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard, LONDON.
M DCC LXXIX.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

BRITISH MUSEUM

THE PREFACE.

THE doctrine advanced in this diſcourſe is by no means *new*, and the interpretations I have given of thoſe texts, which at firſt ſight ſeem to be the moſt unfavourable to it, are, in fact, the ſame that are given by Grotius, and other divines and commentators of the greateſt repute. It ought not, therefore, to give any particular offence. And yet, becauſe the doctrine is here, perhaps, more diſtinctly laid down, more largely illuſtrated, and urged with leſs caution and reſerve, than, I believe, it has been hitherto done, it is not

impoſſible but that it may excite more attention; and that to many, who have been long accuſtomed to a different view of things, it may give more alarm, than it did while the views exhibited of it were but tranſient and indiſtinct. I ſhall, therefore, make a few obſervations on the nature and conſequences of it, that no perſons may complain that they were not fully apprized of the whole extent of what is propoſed to them.

This doctrine of the excluſion of all *immediate agency of the Deity on the minds of men*, reſtraining them from evil, or diſpoſing them to good, and of his doing this by no other means than the natural influence of proper inſtructions and motives, certainly goes to the root of the groſſeſt and moſt dangerous deluſions that the chriſtian world has, in all ages, been ſubject to. It precludes the bold pretenſions of all empirics in religion, by whatever name they have been diſtinguiſhed, with the vain hopes of all that are liable to be deluded by them; and it ſupplies the only baſis of that practical religion that

that is truly rational and ſafe. It is utterly incompatible with the very principle and ground of the doctrine of *ſovereign and irreſiſtible grace*, the poſſibility of *inſtantaneous converſion*, and conſequently of any true and availing converſion at the lateſt hour of life. Let all thoſe, therefore, who are attached to ſuch notions be apprized, that the doctrine contended for in this diſcourſe is exceedingly hoſtile to them. It is, however, a doctrine that, I am confident, the more it is examined, the more conſonant it will appear to be to reaſon (that is, to all actual *appearances* and *facts*) and to the genuine ſenſe of ſcripture; and on this account, I am ſatisfied, that their doctrine of a *new* and *miraculous birth* is altogether unſcriptural and deceitful.

On the other hand, the doctrine that excludes all miraculous interpoſitions is by no means inconſiſtent with the belief of a *particular providence*, or of an intended correſpondence between all events that are coincident, or that have any relation to each

other. For whether thoſe coincidences, which are aſcribed to a particular providence, be brought about juſt at the time of the reſpective events, or were originally provided for in the general plan, the *deſign* is the very ſame. We equally acknowledge *the hand of God*, though we conſider him as acting by the intervention of ſecond cauſes. It is an uncontroverted maxim of the ſchools, that *cauſa cauſæ eſt cauſa cauſati*. If, therefore, there be an intelligent Author of Nature, who fixed the laws of it, and put the whole complex frame in motion, whatever is the neceſſary reſult of this conſtitution, is to be aſcribed to him.

On this account, however, it may be imagined that the doctrine of this diſcourſe is properly *neceſſarian*, and, taken in its whole extent, true only on that hypotheſis. I anſwer, ſo very great, important, and comprehenſive, as the doctrine of *philoſophical neceſſity*, in my idea of it, is, I believe there cannot be any valuable *moral truth* that does not connect and harmonize with it, if it do not

not directly imply it. There can be no plan of *moral government* that is not built upon it, and every thing that a philoſopher underſtands by the terms *accountableneſs*, *praiſe* and *blame*, *reward* and *puniſhment*, &c. neceſſarily ſuppoſes it, and nothing that reſpects the *diſcipline of the mind* can have any meaning without it.

But though, ſpeculatively conſidered, the doctrine of neceſſity muſt make a part of every general ſyſtem that is founded on truth, yet, at the ſame time, the doctrine of this particular diſcourſe is no more neceſſarian than every thing that we can preach and inculcate for the *moral good of men* is ſo; and therefore thoſe who are not neceſſarians will find no greater difficulty in admitting the doctrine of this diſcourſe in conſiſtency with their peculiar principles, than any other tenet in religion or morals. With much more juſtice might it be ſaid, that the doctrine of *divine preſcience* is a neceſſarian doctrine, which, however, all who pretend to piety, and eſpecially all who believe the ſcriptures, *muſt* maintain; and

the embarraſſment they will be under on that ſubject cannot but be much greater than any that can ariſe in this caſe.

Whatever notion men may entertain of *divine* and *human agency*, there muſt be ſomething to which they will give the appellation of the *uſual*, or *eſtabliſhed courſe of nature*, and, in ſome ſenſe or other, they muſt aſcribe this to God; for though the *deciſion of the will* be ſuppoſed to be independent of him, the *acting* in conſequence of it cannot be ſo. He muſt at leaſt *permit, when he might prevent*, if he does not directly *appoint*, whatever comes to paſs. Indeed, according to the doctrine of *philoſophical liberty*, this courſe of nature muſt be a thing more evidently diſtinct from the direct interpoſition of the deity than upon the doctrine of neceſſity, which ultimately aſcribes all to God.

It muſt, therefore, be perfectly conſiſtent with the principles of thoſe who are advocates for what they call *liberty*, to maintain, with me, that the work of converſion and refor-

reformation is ſomething that takes place according to the uſual courſe of nature, whatever that be, and that it is not to be aſcribed to any thing out of it; and they are at liberty to aſcribe the *opening of the heart of Lydia*, and the *hardening the heart of Pharaoh*, to the former, rather than to the latter of theſe cauſes, as much as myſelf; and accordingly many of them have done ſo. Though, believing, as they do, that there are certain precincts, within which the human mind naturally acts without the control of the deity, they may be inclined to think that his *actual interference* may be ſometimes neceſſary; and therefore they will be more eaſily reconciled to the notion of pretty frequent occaſional, but properly ſupernatural influences, than the neceſſarian (who, as ſuch, believes that nothing is without the ſphere of a properly divine, though regular and conſtant influence) will chuſe to have recourſe to.

All that the advocates for philoſophical liberty can really object to me on this occaſion is, the ſufficiency of the diſtinction between

tween the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary* operation of the divine being, which is a thing altogether foreign to the proper ſubject of this diſcourſe, and therefore does not require to be diſcuſſed in this place. I think I have conſidered it ſufficiently elſewhere.

I may alſo be thought to have had in my eye, and to have *alluded to*, the doctrine of neceſſity, in ſome parts of this diſcourſe. This, I own, is very poſſible, and, unknown to myſelf, it may be the caſe with my other writings, even thoſe that are the moſt foreign to the ſubject; becauſe it is a doctrine that I wiſh always to keep in view, and what I would not willingly ever loſe ſight of. But this cannot be a *material* objection to any thing that I have advanced. The candid will find no difficulty in interpreting ſuch incidental expreſſions (which the more ſharp-ſighted may think to look that way) according to their own ſentiments, or ſubſtitute others in their places. Had not this objection been actually made to the diſcourſe, I own I ſhould have been far from thinking it neceſſary to have

have ſaid any thing on the ſubject in this preface.

The doctrine of this diſcourſe, in common with other great truths, and eſpecially that of the doctrine of neceſſity, will probably never be within the clear comprehenſion of the *vulgar*, ſo that it will always be unpopular; and, as in all other ſuch caſes, it muſt alſo be expected, that the contrary doctrine will be maintained by ſome who rank with the *ſpeculative* and the *learned*. In particular, biſhop Warburton, in his *Treatiſe on Grace*, or *the office and operation of the Holy Spirit*, though he combats what he calls *fanatical pretences to divine influence*, yet takes it for granted, that the ſpirit of God abides with the church for ever, "in his office of "Comforter, both in ſupporting the will, "and in his office of enlightening or di-"recting the underſtanding"; meaning, no doubt, ſome immediate agency of the deity on the mind. This alſo ſeems to be the general opinion of chriſtians, who acquieſce in the moſt obvious meaning of ſcripture language,

guage, and who do not give much attention to the phenomena, and powers of the human mind. But, at the ſame time, it is not pretended by thoſe who hold this doctrine, that there can be any *poſitive proof* of this kind of divine agency, ſince they acknowledge that the affections and reſolutions dictated by it are not to be diſtinguiſhed from the natural operations of the mind. But is not this flying from one unſupported hypotheſis to another, equally unſupported? Nay, thoſe fanatics whom the biſhop expoſes pretend to evident *facts* in ſupport of their opinion; whereas he does not pretend to be able to aſſign any fact at all in ſupport of his. What muſt philoſophers think of ſuch an hypotheſis as this!

No inconvenience will ariſe to the generality of chriſtians from confounding, as they will do, *primary* and *ſecondary cauſes*, the agency of God, and the operations of their own minds, and eſpecially their occaſionally overlooking ſecond cauſes ſo far as to aſcribe every thing that is *good* immediately to God, (which ſeems to have been the caſe with the pious

pious writers of the ſcriptures;) provided they do not ſo far leave *themſelves* out of the queſtion, as to neglect the only effectual means of eſtabliſhing themſelves in virtue. It cannot be expected but that the generality of mankind will content themſelves with the moſt *obvious appearances in nature*, and the generality of chriſtians with the moſt *literal interpretation of ſcripture language*. But let them not be offended if others, who give more attention to appearances, ſee in them what they do not, but what they may ſee is not unfavourable to piety and virtue. *By their fruits ye ſhall know men*, is the wiſe rule of our Saviour. Let us therefore be upon our guard againſt judging from the *ſuppoſed tendencies* of things, when the *real* tendencies, and actual *effects*, cannot fail to manifeſt themſelves in due time.

As this diſcourſe relates to a capital article in *the hiſtory of the corruptions of chriſtianity*, to a miſtake and a deluſion, which aroſe chiefly, I believe, with the Montaniſts, but has

has entered deeply into every ſpecies of corrupted chriſtianity to the preſent time, I ſhall take this opportunity of informing my friends and the public, that the hiſtory which I have long propoſed to write of all the material corruptions of chriſtianity has grown ſo much upon my hands, that I think proper to make it a *ſeparate work*, and not a CONTINUATION of the *Inſtitutes of natural and revealed religion*.

Indeed, that work, already containing *a view of all the branches of natural religion, the evidences of revelation, and all the moſt important information we derive from it*, is ſufficiently comprehenſive and complete of itſelf. I therefore conſider it as *cloſed*; and I give my friends this public aſſurance, that I ſhall not fail to keep in view the other work I have promiſed them, and for which I have long been collecting materials. I am afraid however that, after all, I ſhall not be able to ſatisfy their expectations; but I hope that what I ſhall do may be of ſome uſe, till ſomething more complete on the ſubject be done

done by others. I ſhall probably publiſh it in ſeparate parts, as I may happen to have opportunities for compleating any of them, without waiting till I can finiſh and arrange the whole, which is not a matter of much conſequence.

And he ſpake many things unto them in parables; ſaying, Behold, a ſower went out to ſow; and when he ſowed, ſome ſeeds fell by the way ſide, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon ſtony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they ſprung up, becauſe they had no deepneſs of earth. And when the Sun was up, they were ſcorched; and becauſe they had no root, they withered away. And ſome fell among thorns, and the thorns ſprung up and choked them. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, ſome an hundred fold, ſome ſixty fold, ſome thirty fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

MATT. xiii. 3—10.

IN this parable our Lord gives an account of the reception that his Goſpel would meet with in the world, according to the different characters of thoſe to whom it would be propoſed. It may, therefore, be

conſidered as a prophecy; and it is a prophecy verified by all hiſtory, and indeed by the obſervation of every day; announcing to us, that the effects of religious truths, and of religious impreſſions of all kinds, depend upon the diſpoſition of mind with which they are received; ſo that, though the doctrines of the goſpel be the ſame things in themſelves, the conſequence of the general promulgation of them will be very various.

Our Lord ſeems to lay peculiar ſtreſs on the doctrine of this parable, by cloſing it with ſaying, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*; and if we properly attend to it, we ſhall find that it abounds with the moſt important inſtruction, both to thoſe who preach the goſpel, and thoſe who hear it. At preſent I ſhall conſider it in no more than one ſingle point of view, endeavouring to illuſtrate and inculcate one important truth plainly intimated to us in it, viz. that all the benefit we are authorized to expect from the goſpel ariſes from the natural effect that the

the great truths and motives of it are calculated to produce upon the mind; that the interpoſition of the Divine Being in the diſpenſation of the goſpel conſiſts ſolely in imparting thoſe truths, and ſuggeſting thoſe motives, and not at all in giving any ſupernatural efficacy to the truths or motives after they are preſented.

Our Lord evidently compares himſelf, and his apoſtles, to perſons who merely ſow good ſeed (which the earth could not bring forth of itſelf) and this they are repreſented as ſcattering promiſcuouſly, without diſtinction of places or ſoils, which were juſt as nature, or previous circumſtances, had made them. Conſequently, where the ſoil was previouſly well diſpoſed to receive it, the produce was ample; but where it was, on any account, undiſpoſed, the produce was inſignificant, or none at all.

The preachers of the goſpel, here exhibited in the character of huſbandmen, are not repreſented as altering the quality or

condition of the ſoil itſelf; and therefore we find that the goſpel was ſometimes a ſavour of life, and at other times of death. So though it is elſewhere compared to *light*, which is generally a very welcome thing, yet ſome are ſaid to *hate this light, becauſe their deeds were evil.* Alſo, though the evidences of the divine miſſion of Chriſt were fairly and equally propoſed to all; yet our Saviour ſays, that they only who *do the will of God*, i. e. thoſe who are upright and previouſly well diſpoſed, *ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* Others would be ſo prejudiced, that the ſtrongeſt evidence would not be properly attended to, and therefore could not have its proper effect; in ſo much that he expreſly tells theſe bigoted Jews, that *they would not come to him that they might have life*; and applying to them a prophecy of Iſaiah, he repreſents them as ſo far infatuated by vicious prejudices, that it was *not in their power* to receive the Goſpel. And unleſs they had had better diſpoſitions of mind, which he did not pretend to give them, it was really and truly impoſſible.

I

In another parable our Lord compares human nature not to the *ſoil*, as in my text, but to a *fig-tree* growing in it, Luke xiii. 6--9, and in this the nature or quality of the *tree* itſelf is repreſented as unaltered, except by the effect that *digging round it* and *dunging it* might produce.

A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and ſought fruit thereon, and found none. Then ſaid he unto the dreſſer of his vineyard, Behold, theſe three years I come ſeeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground. And he, anſwering, ſaid unto him, Lord let it alone this year alſo, till I ſhall dig about it, and dung it. And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou ſhalt cut it down.

In both theſe parables, you ſee (and I doubt not it will be found to be the ſame in every other, in which the reformation and inſtruction of men are repreſented) the *nature of man* is ſuppoſed to be a thing that is never operated upon by the divine power

immediately, but always through the medium of certain means, without the mind, naturally adapted to that end. When man is the *ſoil*, nothing is done to it beſides ſcattering proper ſeed upon it, and this ſeed will take root, or not, according to the previous quality and ſtate of the ſoil; and when man is a *tree*, nothing is done to *that*, but only to the ſoil in which it grows; ſo that tho' the figures are different, the meaning of the two parables, the inſtruction we are led to derive from them, is the ſame; and if we attend to it, we ſhall find it to be very important indeed, ſuch as, when fully apprehended, cannot fail to alarm and to arouſe us to the utmoſt.

We clearly learn from them, that the agency of God upon the minds of men, though real, and conſtant *(for in him we live, and move, and have our being)* is not *immediate*, or *miraculous* (for if it were immediate, it would be the ſame thing with what we do term miraculous) but always through the medium of the natural means of inſtruction and reformation; and conſequently

quently that, without proper *opportunity*, and eſpecially without proper *time* for thoſe means to produce their effect, no change is to be expected.

Miniſters, therefore, may learn that, under God, who is the author of nature, and by whoſe agency all cauſes produce their proper effects, every thing depends upon their labours with their people, and that they can do nothing without labour; and the people may be apprized that, without their own earneſt endeavours, concurring with the inſtruction and admonitions of their miniſters, and other means of virtue and religion, they cannot receive any real benefit.

But miniſters may likewiſe learn for their comfort, that, ſince all the laws of nature, and among them thoſe to which the human mind is ſubject, are uniform, and conſequently all cauſes never fail to produce an adequate effect, according to the circumſtances in which they operate; if their admonitions be proper in themſelves, and ſea-

ſonably applied, their labour can never be wholly in vain. They will always have more or leſs effect, and therefore they may go through with their pious labours with chearfulneſs and good hope.

And the people, likewiſe, impreſſed with the ſame perſuaſion, will attend upon the word of exhortation, and diligently apply themſelves to all the means of religion; aſſuring themſelves that, whether the effect of their application be viſible or not, it is not loſt. Their characters are really improving; and by a ſteady perſeverance in receiving proper nouriſhment, they cannot fail (tho' inſenſibly, if the ſtate of their minds be compared at ſhort intervals) to *grow in grace*, till they come to the *full meaſure of the ſtature of Chriſt Jeſus our Lord.*

Whereas, without this perſuaſion concerning the uniformity of the laws of nature reſpecting our minds and their affections, miniſters and people will both be ſubject to great occaſional deſpondence, whenever preſent

ſent appearances happen not to be favourable; and ſome, in conſequence of not always feeling (and it is impoſſible they ſhould at all times feel) a lively ſenſe of religious impreſſions, will abandon themſelves to deſpair.

We ſhall learn to reſpect the laws of nature the more, if we conſider the extraordinary proviſion that the author of nature has made to preſerve their uniformity, and to ſuperſede the neceſſity of the frequent violation of them; which he has done by means of occaſional and ſeaſonable miraculous interpoſitions. In fact, the proper uſe of miracles has been to make more miracles unneceſſary. Alſo, miracles have generally reſpected the *external world*, and have had their effect on the minds of men in a natural and regular manner; and, therefore, they have produced very different effects according to the previous different ſtates of men's minds. And indeed, all external miracles, all that appear to have ever been provided in the hiſtory of the various diſpenſations of God to man, have been inſignificant, and the whole plan of them

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was idle and abſurd, if it was neceſſary that *internal miracles* ſhould be wrought alſo.

If moral impreſſions were made upon men's minds by an immediate divine agency, to what end has been the whole apparatus of *revealed religion*. For what rational purpoſe were all the miracles wrought by Moſes, by Chriſt, and by the apoſtles (the only object of which was to impreſs the minds of men with a conviction of the divine miſſion of certain teachers of religion, and, thereby, of the credit that was due to their inſtructions, in order, finally, that ſuch inſtructions might the more eaſily produce that excellence of moral character which, in the epiſtle of St. Peter, is called a *divine nature*) if the Divine Being had, after all this, ſtill found it neceſſary to produce this excellent diſpoſition and character by his own immediate agency.

Has not God, at all times, the moſt intimate acceſs to the minds of men; and cannot he who made us at firſt, new-make us, and

and new-mould us, as he pleaſes. Is it not in his power, by a word, a volition, that word and energy by which *he ſpake and it was done*, by which *he commanded, and the whole creation ſtood faſt*, to change the hearts of the worſt of men in an inſtant, and make them breathe the ſpirit of the pureſt angels; and cannot he preſerve them in this ſtate of ſinleſs purity and excellence to all eternity? Certainly this, and every thing elſe that is poſſible in itſelf, is within the compaſs of his almighty power.

But, notwithſtanding this, it is evident from fact (whether we ſhall be able fully to comprehend the reaſon of it or not) that he has not thought proper to work in this manner. And though it is his wiſh that *all men ſhould be ſaved*, and *he wiſhes not the death of any ſinner*, but *had rather that they ſhould repent and live*, he does not think proper to work miracles on the minds of men for this purpoſe; but only provides *authoritative inſtruction*, and proper *motives*; which, being addreſſed to the mind, operate upon it in an uniform and regular manner.

Thus,

Thus, when the old world became abandoned to wickedneſs, he only ſent Enoch and Noah to preach to men; but he thought proper to deſtroy them all, perhaps by a proper miracle, rather than reform them, as he might have done, by his own immediate agency.

When the Iſraelites fell into idolatry, and the many horrid vices at that time inſeparable from idolatry, he ſent prophets from time to time to admoniſh them of various impending calamities. But when thoſe admonitions had no good effect, he always thought proper that the threatened calamities, as famine, peſtilence, war, or captivity, ſhould actually overtake them, rather than give (as with a volition he might have done) a ſupernatural effect to the warnings and expoſtulations of his ſervants, by his own influence upon their minds.

So alſo when God had compaſſion on the whole world lying in wickedneſs, and irrecoverably ſunk in ſuperſtition and vice, all that

that he did to reclaim them was to ſend the goſpel among them. And whatever moral good has been produced in the world by it, has been by natural means, and, to all appearance, by no other means whatever; theſe being fully adequate to the effect: and whereever the publication of the goſpel, and of the great truths and motives of it, has failed to produce good effects, they have not been produced at all, but men continue wicked and abandoned, doomed to certain deſtruction.

Our Lord even wept over Jeruſalem, deſiring, with the greateſt affection and earneſtneſs, to reclaim the inhabitants of it, and prevent their impending calamities; but his labours, and thoſe of the apoſtles, failing of ſucceſs (that infatuated people continuing in their obſtinate impenetency and unbelief) God did not interpoſe any farther; and tho' the Jews are ſtiled his *peculiar people*, he gave them up to the vengeance of the Romans, and made their calamities the moſt dreadful, and of the longeſt continuance, of any that are recorded in hiſtory.

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We may aſſure ourſelves, therefore, that God, notwithſtanding the love that he bears to men, as his offſpring, will certainly ſuffer them to periſh, and undergo the pains of hell, whatever they are, rather than ſave them from that puniſhment when they die impenitent; and alſo, that he will ſuffer them to die impenitent, rather than employ any other than the uſual natural means of their repentance and reformation. So ſacred with him are his eſtabliſhed laws of nature.

We read of our Lord's giving ſight to the blind, limbs to the maimed, and the uſe of reaſon to thoſe who were deprived of it; but never of his giving a *ſound mind*, in a moral ſenſe, to thoſe who were deſtitute of that. For this, though the greateſt of all purpoſes, he made uſe of nothing but inſtruction and admonition. He uſed no other means either to diſarm the malice of his enemies, or to correct the imperfections of his beſt friends. Otherwiſe Judas would never have betrayed him, nor would Peter have denied him.

It might ſeem a matter not unworthy of divine interpoſition, to ſhorten, or at leaſt to alleviate in ſome meaſure, the extreme ſufferings of ſo excellent a perſon as our Saviour; and the wiſdom of the world was ſo much offended at the thought of a *ſuffering Meſſiah*, that in the early ages of chriſtianity, great numbers could not be reconciled to the thought, and therefore maintained that our Lord ſuffered only in appearance, when in reality, he felt no pain; and ſome in modern times have ſuppoſed that he put an end to his own life, before he could have been releaſed from his pains in the courſe of nature. But, according to the plaineſt evidence of hiſtory, his death was as properly the natural effect of pain and torture, in the exhauſted ſtate to which he was previouſly reduced, eſpecially by his agony in the garden, as that of any criminal who is now impaled, or broken on the wheel. And indeed the notion of our Lord's availing himſelf of his miraculous power, to alleviate or ſhorten his own ſufferings, could not but have the very worſt effect upon the minds of thoſe who ſhould

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be called to ſuffer in his cauſe, and who muſt know that they were not poſſeſſed of any ſuch advantage.

Laſtly, God has been pleaſed to ſuffer the chriſtian religion to be exceedingly debaſed by a mixture of heathen opinions and ſuperſtitions, and a power to be aſſumed in his church ſo contrary to the genius of it, as to be termed, in the language of prophecy, *anti-chriſtian*, rather than interfere to prevent the operation of natural cauſes, tending to introduce thoſe corruptions, and to eſtabliſh that enormous power. And though the Divine Being has reſolved to reform his church, to put a period to thoſe abuſes, and to overturn that uſurped authority, he does it only by means of natural cauſes; by providing, in the uſual courſe of things, a better underſtanding of the ſcriptures, an increaſe of knowledge of various other kinds, and a juſter ſenſe of men's natural rights and privileges. Theſe cauſes have been operating ſome centuries, and will, no doubt, at length accompliſh the great ends for which they were provided.

But

But theſe means of reforming the chriſtian church, and reſtoring it to its priſtine purity, are, in all reſpects, *natural*, and by no means do they come under the deſcription of miracles. Yet we do, and ought to bleſs God for the Reformation.

It will be ſaid that, according to the plaineſt language of the ſcriptures, God *does* work upon the minds of men, and that the ſucceſs of the preaching of the goſpel is, in a particular manner, aſcribed to it. Does not Paul ſay, (1 Cor. iii. 6.) *I have planted, and Apollos watered, but God gave the increaſe?*

I anſwer, that this repreſentation is undoubtedly and moſt ſtrictly true. The ſucceſs of the goſpel is certainly the work of God; but the queſtion is, whether, in this, he works *with*, or *without*, *natural means*; and it is not the leſs his work, becauſe he employs certain means adapted to anſwer his purpoſes. His agency is juſt as complete on one ſuppoſition as on the other. All the difference reſpects the mode or manner

of his operation; and it becomes us to look at all times beyond all ſecond cauſes, to the ultimate and proper cauſe of all good, which is God only. For ſtrictly ſpeaking, as our Lord himſelf obſerved, *There is none good but one, that is God*; all other goodneſs being only the effect of his.

In this caſe, is not the goſpel itſelf called *the goſpel of God*, becauſe he gave it? Was it not by his appointment that Paul preached it at Corinth, and that Apollos watered it there; and if, after this, the natural effect of the Corinthians hearing the goſpel was their receiving and profiting by it, is not the whole to be aſcribed to the God of Nature, and providence? Without that conſtitution of nature, by which their minds were diſpoſed to receive the truths of the goſpel, and without the providential events of Paul planting the goſpel, and Apollos watering it, the Corinthians had been mere heathens ſtill.

That this language is only the ſame in which the pious writers of the ſcriptures deſcribe

deſcribe all the events of providence, overlooking all ſecond cauſes, and regarding the primary cauſe only, is evident from numberleſs paſſages. Does not the Pſalmiſt, (Pſalm civ. 27) repreſent all the beaſts of the field as *waiting upon God, that he may give them their meat in due ſeaſon. Thou giveſt them*, ſays he, *they gather. Thou openeſt thine hand, they are filled with good.*

But does God feed wild beaſts by miracle, as he fed the Iſraelites in the wilderneſs? By no means; though the language, literally interpreted, would denote as much. His feeding them is in the common courſe of providence, by giving them natural powers for ſeizing their prey, and thus enabling them to provide for themſelves. And very often, not being able to meet with proper food, or being diſabled by accidents from ſeizing it, they actually ſtarve and periſh.

In the ſame manner, therefore, we ought to interpret what is ſaid of God's giving the increaſe when Paul planted, and Apollos watered;

tered; and alſo what is ſaid of Lydia, Acts xvi. 14. viz. that *God opened her heart, that ſhe attended to the things that were ſpoken by Paul.* By a train of previous circumſtances and impreſſions, all under the direction of providence, ſhe was diſpoſed to receive the preaching of Paul with due attention, and without prejudice.

We are inſtructed to pray that God would give us, *day by day, our daily bread,* and it is from God that we *do* receive our daily bread; but it is only in the natural courſe of things, and by the uſe of proper means for procuring it for ourſelves. We are alſo authorized to pray that God would *create in us a clean heart, and renew in us a right Spirit*; and if we have a clean heart, and a right ſpirit, we ought to aſcribe that to God alſo, and not, as the heathen Stoics did, to themſelves, excluſively of God. But God gives us good diſpoſitions of mind as he gives us our daily bread, in a natural, and by no means in a ſupernatural manner; it is by the help of means adapted to impreſs our minds, and never without

out them. The language of ſcripture is uniform, and exactly ſimilar in both theſe caſes, and therefore is certainly to be underſtood in the ſame manner.

If we admit any other interpretation of ſuch language as this, we ſhall aſcribe moral evil to the immediate divine agency, as well as moral good. For God is as expreſsly ſaid to *harden the heart of Pharoah*, as to *open that of Lydia*; whereas there does not appear to have been any occaſion for a miracle to harden the heart of Pharoah. He acted juſt as other bad men, blinded by their paſſions and by their intereſt, in ſimilar circumſtances, ſtill act; and his hardneſs and obſtinacy anſwering the moſt important purpoſes in the plan of Divine providence, it was, for that end, no doubt, permitted to take place.

In ſickneſs we always do, and ought to pray for health; but we never expect that God will interpoſe by miracle to relieve us. When limbs are to be amputated, and other operations in ſurgery are to be per-

formed, we look up to God, but at the ſame time we never fail to have recourſe to the hand of a ſkilful ſurgeon.

Even when the Divine Being has addreſſed himſelf to the mind of man in a ſupernatural manner, as in the gift of prophecy, it does not appear that ſuch communications have ever affected the moral character of thoſe who were the ſubjects of them, any farther than ſuch communications tended, in a natural way, to produce that effect. Balaam was a bad man, though he was a prophet; and though Saul was for a time among the prophets, his character was not altered, but he continued the ſame man to the end of his life.

The apoſtle Paul was converted to chriſtianity by the miraculous appearance of Chriſt to him; but it does not appear that his temper of mind was changed by it, otherwiſe than a full conviction of the truth of chriſtianity naturally and neceſſarily made a change in him. He ſtill poſſeſſed the ſame vehemence of temper, the ſame zeal and ardour

of

of mind, though in a different cauſe. He became, no doubt, a much better man upon the whole, than he would have been if he had continued a Jew, but it was in conſequence of being actuated by better principles, and of being ſubjected to more favourable influences. It ſhould be conſidered that, inſtead of inflaming his hatred of men by the practice of perſecuting them, he would have the beſt opportunity of improving in meekneſs, patience, and a love of the brethren, in conſequence of being himſelf perſecuted along with them. Thus would his ſuperior virtues naturally ariſe from his being in circumſtances peculiarly favourable to the acquiſition and growth of them.

The cure of madneſs, called, in the language of ſcripture, *the caſting out of dæmons*, (to the malignant influence of which that diſorder was uſually aſcribed) and alſo the gift of tongues, were miracles that immediately reſpected the minds, or the mental faculties of men, but they were not of a moral nature. It no more followed that a man

reſtored to the uſe of his reaſon would be a good man, than one that was reſtored to his health, or the uſe of his limbs. Paul expreſly ſuppoſes that a man might have the gift of tongues, and yet not have charity; and not only to thoſe who were the ſubjects of miracles, but even to ſome of the workers of them, our Lord himſelf aſſures us he will ſay, *I know you not; depart from me ye workers of iniquity.*

Prayer for good diſpoſitions of mind is proper on the idea of God being the real giver of all the good we receive, though in the uſual courſe of nature, of which he is the author; and alſo more eſpecially of his realizing to us that character of *parent* and *guardian*, which he has condeſcended to aſſume. And if he *has* provided that our reaſonable requeſts ſhall actually be granted, it is the very ſame thing to us, whether this be brought about by his mediate or his immediate agency. He is ſtill the giver, and the only difference is in the manner of beſtowing the gift. It is to God that we ought always to look

look for the ſupply of all our wants, corporeal or mental, and to him ſhould our gratitude be expreſſed; for the goſpel and all its effects, as well as for food and raiment. And we actually receive bleſſings of both theſe kinds, viz. ſpiritual and temporal, in the ſame manner. It is always through the channel of ſome natural means, and never, at leaſt, in this age of the world, by miracle.

Let us, therefore, look up to God for every thing, but always in the uſe of proper means; and let us beware of deceiving ourſelves, as too many do, by expecting any end whatever, eſpecially a proper temper of mind, neceſſary to qualify us for future happineſs, without the diligent uſe of ſuch means as he has preſcribed for that purpoſe. If God had thought proper to work, and gain this end, by miracles, there would have been no occaſion whatever for preaching, for the goſpel itſelf, or even for the practice of virtue, which is the end of the goſpel, and of the preaching of it. For, as I have, indeed, obſerved already, could not

not the Divine Being change the hearts of the moſt profligate of men the moment they were to enter another world, and fit them as completely for the enjoyment of heaven, as if he had made them go through all the difficulties, trials, and diſcipline, of a virtuous life? But as we are well aſſured that God *will not* do this, though he is certainly able to do it, we may be equally aſſured, that the hearts of none will be thus miraculouſly changed in an inſtant, as many ſuppoſe, at any period of life. A real change of character, from vice to virtue, is only to be effected in a natural, and conſequently in a gradual manner.

If this doctrine be true (and the whole tenor of ſcripture and reaſon confirm it) the doctrine of *inſtantaneous converſion* is altogether a moſt dangerous deluſion. Buoyed up by this vain hope, men continue in ſin, fancying they can be converted at the very hour of death; and though they are even brought to the gallows by their crimes, even from thence they pretend to be ſure of going to heaven.

But

But if there be any ſuch thing as an *eſtabliſhed courſe of nature*, if our minds be ſubject to any regular laws and influences, and if changes of mind are made in no other manner than by the natural influence of the objects preſented to them, and by the circumſtances in which men are placed (which certainly correſponds to fact) *time* muſt be requiſite to form any character. A *character* is a thing of ſlow growth, but of a firm conſtitution. The rudiments of it are formed early, while the mind is ſenſible to impreſſions of all kinds; but when once it is formed, it is with great difficulty indeed that it receives any material and laſting change.

Miniſters therefore ſhould beſtow their labour chiefly on the *young*, inſtructing them in the principles of religion, inculcating good maxims, forming them to good habits, and making every thing in religious diſcipline familiar to them. This is bending the oak while it is pliable, and while the taſk is not difficult. But, with reſpect to perſons advanced in life, all that we can hope to do is

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to palliate exceſſes, and prevent enormities. The character, the general temper, and turn of mind, are fixed, and can no more be made to bend to our efforts, than an oak of ſome growth and ſtanding.

I ſhall conclude with obſerving, that there are two things that we ſhould principally attend to with reſpect to God, and both are of the greateſt importance. The firſt is, the conſideration of his univerſal preſence, and his conſtant uncontrolled agency; and the ſecond is, his acting by natural means, or in a regular manner. We muſt, in the firſt place, endeavour to ſee God in every thing, and to ſee every thing in God, that is, in its relation to him. We muſt habitually look beyond all ſecond cauſes, conſidering them in no other light than as inſtruments in the hands of God, the only proper cauſe of all, and employed by him to accompliſh, in the beſt manner, his excellent purpoſes.

But, in the ſecond place, it is almoſt of as much importance, that we conſider God not as a being

a being incapable of foreſight, and acting as particular occaſions and emergencies require, but as foreſeeing every thing that can ever come to paſs, and adapting means to ends from all eternity: as acting by general laws, and eſtabliſhed rules, without ever deviating from them, except for great and extraordinary purpoſes; and then in ſuch a manner as that his interpoſition ſhall be publickly known and acknowledged, ſo as to have the effect of proper miracles. And now, that God has ſufficiently provided for the inſtruction and reformation of mankind by the goſpel, we are to conſider the age of miracles as over. And if we are not to expect miraculous interpoſitions in the external world, ſimilar to thoſe that were exhibited in the times of Moſes and the prophets, or thoſe that attended and promoted the firſt promulgation of the goſpel, much leſs can we expect any miraculous influences on the minds of men; which, in a moral ſenſe, do not appear to have ever been the ſubject of miracles in former times. Indeed, in this ſenſe they would have been a very improper

ſubject

ſubject or theatre of miracles, on many obvious accounts.

Not to reſpect the general preſence and agency of God is *practical atheiſm*. It is *living without God in the world*; and to expect his miraculous interpoſitions, and not to conſider him as acting by general laws, is to encourage an *enthuſiaſm*, and a *deluſion*, that is, in ſome caſes, almoſt as dangerous; leading men to neglect the natural and only efficacious means of improving their characters, and to depend on certain ſupernatural impulſes and feelings, of vague and uncertain deſcription, and that cannot have any relation to moral virtue; which conſiſts in a ſupreme reverence and love of God, an entire devotedneſs to his will, in doing and ſuffering, a diſintereſted love of his creatures, and our brethren, and a juſt ſelf-government, equally favourable to both.

On the whole, the doctrine of *divine agency* and *divine influence*, reſpecting things ſpiritual, as well as temporal, is true, and in the higheſt degree

degree important. Our characters approach to perfection in proportion as we keep it in view, and they are debaſed and bad, in proportion as we loſe ſight of it. But the doctrine of a proper *ſupernatural influence* on the mind is falſe; and though, like moſt other falſe principles, it *may* be very innocent, not in fact ſuperſeding the uſe of the natural means of religion, it is always deluſive, and in ſome caſes highly dangerous.

Let this doctrine, therefore, teach us, as *individuals*, to cultivate above all things a ſpirit of *habitual devotion*, founded on the belief of the divine preſence with us, and of his conſtant agency upon us, and upon all things. This is that *faith* which is the only ſure anchor of the ſoul in a tempeſtuous world, or rather it is the wings on which we riſe above the world, and approach to a ſtate of union with God.

But let us carefully avoid indulging the vain and deluſive imagination of an immediate and ſupernatural communion with God, which

which is always the foundation of *ſpiritual pride*, and the bane of humble devotion and virtue. For there is no true devotion without the deepeſt humility, and what is ſometimes not improperly called *ſelf-annihilation*.

As *miniſters and people*, let us bear in mind, on the one hand, that a congregation is a flock, that muſt be tended and fed; that food for the mind muſt be provided, received, and digeſted, like food for the body, and that we receive nouriſhment and ſtrength from both in the ſame natural and gradual manner. We muſt therefore *labour for the bread that endureth to everlaſting life*, as well as for *the bread that periſhes*. And though we are to expect no ſucceſs but in the diligent uſe of proper means, we muſt, at the ſame time, aſcribe to God, and acknowledge that we receive from him (who has wiſely and graciouſly adapted all means to their proper ends) both the bread that we daily eat, and the benefit we receive from the adminiſtration of the word, and ordinances of the goſpel, both our growth in ſtrength and

and ſtature, and what is called our *growth in grace*.

Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To him, therefore, AND TO HIM ONLY, *be glory for ever and ever. Amen.* Rom. xi. 36.

FINIS.

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